

TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

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SELLING CONSERVATION

Jerry Lumm, Area Range Conservationist, Area II, recently put together the following article for use in a training session. The message Jerry conveys will be useful to all Idaho SCS employees that will be involved in conservation planning, especially with rangeland users. We are therefore, sending this to you as a technical note. The message conveyed will be useful now and in the future for review and training of new employees.

Donald H. Fulton
State Resource Conservationist

"YOUR JOB IS"

As employees of the Soil Conservation Service, our main job is not to apply conservation to the land, but to "sell" conservation to the people who will apply it to the land. In that respect, we are salesmen or saleswomen. The job of selling conservation is not all that easy. Unlike most salespeople, we do not have an obvious product to show our buyer.

The following can help us do a better job of selling. This information mainly comes from Howard Passey, former State Resource Conservationist for Texas. Mr. Passey had an unusual ability to work effectively with people in getting them to apply conservation. I have also interjected what I have learned from my own experience.

All of us have the word "conservationist" as part of our working titles. however, we do not apply conservation to the land. Our job is to sell conservation to the people, and they in turn will apply it to the land, if we have done a good job of selling.

When working with land operators, confine your discussions to their problems and opportunities and avoid canned or theoretical generalizations full of technical jargon.

Help them evaluate and decide what they want to do to improve their land. Don't make recommendations on what the Soil Conservation Service wants them to do.

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If a person does not want to do something, they will come up with a dozen reasons why it can't be done. On the other hand, if they want it badly enough, they will do everything in their power to make it work. Our job is to "motivate" the land user to want to do the job.

One cardinal rule is never ask them a question to which they might give the wrong answer. If they do give the wrong answer, you are faced with telling them they are wrong. This will put them on the defensive and you will have a breakdown in communication. An example of a better approach would be to say "most people think plants get their food from the soil, but you and I know they don't because there is no plant food in the soil." Also, never let a man commit himself to a specific stocking rate or treatment measure until you have made an inventory of all his resources. Some people do not like to back down, even if they know they are wrong.

Get the rancher involved. Ask leading questions. Have him supply information even if you don't really need it. Listen to what he is saying, make him think you really need all the information he gives you. This will make him feel important. If you accept his ideas, he will more readily accept yours. Make the landowner think he thought up the idea in the first place. Always give him full credit for good things he is doing and for good ideas he has. Everyone likes a pat on the back. Don't get carried away though and agree to everything. If you know he is dead wrong, say something like "that is probably true in some cases, but would you consider looking at it this way."

Always strive to recognize the problems of the rancher as well as his goals, aims, wishes and desires. We must recognize that many ranchers have financial limitations and cannot go along with everything either he or we would like him to do.

When you have a planning date, make sure you are there at the agreed time. Always take the initiative, don't wait for Mr. Rancher to ask "now what was it you wanted to do today." Tell him right off that you are here to help him develop his conservation plan and to help figure how to make the most efficient use of his lands. Let him know that his objectives are the same as yours, to grow the greatest amount of high quality forage on every acre of his land that is capable of producing. Ask him how much time he has to be with you. If his time is limited, it may be best to reschedule it to another day.

It is usually best to start off by coming to an understanding of what is to be done. This might be called "laying the cards on the table". It might include such a statement as:

"We want to be sure we agree on a few basic points. First, I recognize that you own this land. You have the deed to it. You are the boss and you must make the decisions on how you will use and treat your land. I may argue a bit with you, but you still make the decisions.

Second, I recognize that you know your place better than I ever will. You know every ridge and draw and patch of brush on the ranch.

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Third, I recognize that you know more about livestock than I do. Especially about your livestock and how they handle on your ranch.

Now, we feel we know some things about your soils - what they are capable of producing, their moisture relationship and limitations. And also about your forage plants - how they grow, what their requirements are, how they compete with each other, how they respond to the time and amount of grazing use you apply, and how we can get the most efficient use of them.

Our proposal is simply this: Let's take your knowledge of the ranch and the livestock, add our information on your soils and plants (how they grow, what their requirements are, etc.), put all this information together and we can develop a better, more complete conservation plan than either of us could work out separately."

Lay out a brief outline of the planning job you hope to accomplish. Let him know you have a map of his land. Tell him that you want to look at his grasses, soil, etc. Suggest that this can best be done by going over the ranch pasture by pasture. This way we can look at the grasses and soil in each pasture and at the same time plot the fences and watering facilities.

It is best to start in a pasture that has a good patch of grass. It is easier to "botanize" and find a healthy plant to dig up for the demonstration on how plants grow.

A good understanding of how plants grow is basic in ranch planning. This is the foundation on which management plans are based. Always put emphasis on "why". Why 50 percent for proper use. Why plants need to rest. Why pastures profit from rest following grazing or brush management.

The only way rangeland condition can be improved is through proper use of the key plants.

Your three best tools in ranch planning are your spade, the plant you dig with the spade and the soil the plant was growing in.

Get the rancher involved with what you are doing. Hand him a hand full of soil. Let him hold the grass plant while you talk about root, leaf, and seed stalk developments. If you are making a clipping, get him to help you. Tell him "If you will start on that side, I will start over here." While he is down on his knees helping you clip, you can show him the condition of the soil surface, amount of mulch, new seedlings, etc.

Be on the lookout for "natural visual aids". Point out the good growth of plants protected by falling branches as compared with the same kind of plant exposed to continuous grazing. The former will almost always stay greener during the dry months because of more root development, with deeper penetration in the soil. Make a point of showing him these differences. Dig up a

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heavily grazed plant and a protected plant and look at the root development. Look for fence line contrast. There are many of these natural visual aids in each pasture. It is your job as a salesman to find them and use them to your advantage.

When you illustrate why plants need to rest, the need for flexibility in stocking rate, food storage in plant roots and crown, or other important points which are best illustrated by a visual aid on paper, draw them. Don't show him printed charts or visual aids from your "thunder book". If you draw it out, he will feel as if you are talking about his plants and his land. Besides, if you use printed material, he may get ahead of you and miss the points you are trying to drive home.

Size up the man you are working with, then adapt your approach accordingly. Never talk down to him or above his head. Avoid using technical "jargon" when talking about his soil or grasses, and don't spend much time telling him their technical classification. He won't remember them. It is better to call his soil a loamy or shallow soil and his grasses by their accepted common name. We don't have to use such terms as "photosynthesis", "chlorophyll", or "composition".

The development of the conservation plan is just the first step in getting conservation on the land. No matter how good the plan may be, the rancher does not realize any benefit unless he carries out the provisions in the plan. Always arrange to follow-up by helping him make periodic checks on his management progress.

Never leave the ranch without agreeing on a date in the near future to review his progress. Never tell him you want to check his plan over with him to bring it up-to-date. Be specific. Say something like "let's take a look at your grasses to see how they are coming and see if there is anything we can do to make them grow even better".

Grazing systems will need close follow-up. What may look like a big problem to the rancher may be handled with just minor adjustments in his system. But you are professionals and you should be there to help him over these rough spots.

Always remember we are professionals. It is important that we project this image in everything we do. We must sell ourselves before we can sell conservation.